

2008 Annual Report

Clark County Community Development

A year of significant change

It would be an understatement to say that Clark County Community Development has seen its fair share of change in 2008. It would be more accurate to say that the change has been significant and, at times, nerve racking for all.

As many people know, the department has experienced no less than four rounds of staff lay-offs that began at the tail end of 2007. Notable to the first set of staff changes in February included a couple of filled planner positions being eliminated and the Human Resources Manager moving to the Human Resources Department. The second and third set of lay-offs included a variety of staff from Development Services, Permit Services and Building Safety. Effective in September and November, this reduction in force reflected the steep downturn in the development and building activity felt county-wide. These two lay-offs also resulted in reducing the hours of the Permit Center. The last of the lay-offs occurred during the overall 2009/2010 biannual budget process and affected the Code Enforcement and Animal Protection and Control programs.

There were other changes in 2008 that were organizational in nature. Development Engineering moved from Community Development to Public Works and relocated its offices to the fourth floor. The Fire Marshal took on “double duty” as the Building Safety Manager, overseeing the day-to-day operation of the Permit Center. Organizational changes brought on changes in office space. The Plans Examiners moved from the first floor to the third floor and occupy space with the Building Inspectors. With the move of Development Engineering, Public Works Administration and Transportation moved onto the third floor.

In terms of projects for the year none was more important than a cost of service and fee study. With assistance from the Budget Office, staff worked for months to assess the amount of time it takes to process each of our permits. Coupling time with an hourly rate (based on 2009 costs), we developed a fee proposal that was presented to the Board of Clark County Commissioners in December. Although the fee proposal was not adopted, we continue to work on a proposal that will meet with approval from the board. Related to this work was developing the 2009/2010 biannual budget. With county departments targeted to take a 12 percent reduction in General Fund, Community Development looked at reductions to the Animal Protection and Control, Code Enforcement, and Fire Marshal’s office programs.

With all this change there have been some bright spots in the department. A new, director (yours truly) was hired in the middle of April. (I have admittedly taken some editorial license here to characterize the new director as a



The Timbers at Towne Center

bright spot.) As director I have worked a bit with the management leadership to turn a new communication leaf over such that we become a department that shares more collaboratively in the successes and challenges that come with our work. I also have sensed that Community Development staff has successfully taken on the challenges of the budget and organizational changes that have occurred in the past year.

As we wind our way through 2009, the one most notable project we all will work on will be forging a new relationship with the Board of Clark County Commissioners. I will be working with the chair of the board, Commissioner Boldt, and with County Administrator Bill Barron on an approach for building a new relationship with the sixth floor. Early discussions have led me to conclude that the renewed relationship will be based on mutual respect and trust and will sustain us in a positive way for years to come. Since change has been and will continue to be a constant theme, I close 2008 and begin 2009 with the following:

“All change is a miracle to contemplate, but it is a miracle that is taking place every instant.” — *Henry David Thoreau*

Clark County Community Development

Location:

Public Service Center
Floors one and three
1300 Franklin Street
Vancouver, WA 98660

Mailing:

PO Box 9810
Vancouver, WA 98666-9810

Phone:

(360) 397-2375

Email:

commdev@clark.wa.gov



For an alternate format, contact the Clark County ADA Compliance Office.
Phone: (360)397-2025 Relay: 711 or (800) 833-6384
E-mail: ADA@clark.wa.gov

Web links

You can quickly access valuable information and services on our site that will save you a phone call or a trip to our office.

Through our site you can:

- Learn what we do at **Community Development** and why its important
- Find out what the **average wait time** is today in our Permit Center.
- Use the **digital atlas** to find maps, zoning and other property information
- Learn about **submittal requirements** and the **cost of permits**
- **Request an inspection** of your building project
- Track the status of your **active project**
- Access information on land use, building and engineering **regulations**
- Learn about **proposed developments** in your community
- Learn about the county's **code enforcement** program and request an investigation
- Find out about **pet licensing** and other programs for **responsible pet owners**
- Review the schedule of **upcoming public hearings** and learn how to **provide testimony**



Animal Protection and Control activity

	2007	2008	% change
Service requests	10,398	11,544	11%
Pet licenses	24,373	25,918	6%

A combination of rising hay prices and a poor economy have caused Animal Control to experience a drastic rise in livestock neglect cases over the past year. There was a 283 percent increase in livestock cruelty cases over 2007. Animal Control has worked very closely with the Ripley's Horse Aid Foundation and Clark County Executive Horse Council to offer hay and vet care for horses when owners can no longer provide adequate care. As a last resort, many of the horses have been relinquished and these agencies have provided foster care until the animals are brought back to a healthy condition and adopted. However, managing these cases involves about 20 percent of two officers' time.

A challenge in 2009 will be promoting the pet licensing program. A Pet Licensing Officer position was cut at the end of the year. Pet license revenue helps support the Animal Control program. According to the US Census Bureau statistics, there are an estimated 153,612 dogs and 133,791 cats in Clark County. Last year only 19,387 dogs and 6,531 cats obtained pet licenses. That's less than 13 percent of the dog population and less than 5 percent of the cat population.



Development activity

In 2008 Development Services started accepting electronic applications in an effort to reduce costs for both the applicant and the county. Applicants may now submit their applications on a CD. With electronic submittals, the county can route plans for review electronically, post proposed development plans on the Web and reduce the need to scan documents for archiving.

Development applications	2007	2008	% change
Appeals	13	15	15%
Boundary Line Adjustment	79	57	-28%
Critical Areas	280	189	-33%
Conditional Use Permit	12	5	-58%
Miscellaneous Zoning Review	58	51	-12%
Planned Unit Development	3	1	-67%
Post Decision Review	45	34	-24%
Shoreline	11	7	-36%
Site Plan Review	72	73	1%
Subdivision/Short Plat	97	61	-37%
Variance	14	9	-36%

Totals may not reflect the sum of the year's quarters. Withdrawn, voided or denied cases may be removed in subsequent quarterly reports.

Development Services initiated a 30-day project review by staff for Type II and III applications. Following this review, staff notifies the applicant of outstanding issues, which may involve the need for additional applications (such as road modifications). The applicant then has 14 days to submit the requested information. This new step should help reduce the need to place applications on hold and the number of public hearing continuances or open record requests.

Development Services has witnessed a substantial drop in permits this year. When compared to the five-year average, total land use permits are down 31 percent, pre-application conferences are down 30 percent and land divisions are down 49 percent. On the bright side, site plan reviews (i.e., commercial and industrial development permits) are only down five percent.

Fully Complete Review	goal	2007	2008	% change
First review	21 days	100%	100%	no change
Second and additional reviews	14 days	100%	99%	-1%

Type I Review - 21 days to decision	2007	2008	% change
Number of applications	750	520	-31%
Percent issued within goal	94%	96%	2%

Type II Review - 78 days to decision	2007	2008	% change
Number of applications	214	192	-10%
Percent issued within goal	100%	99%	-1%

Type III Review - 92 days to decision	2007	2008	% change
Number of applications	145	88	-39%
Percent issued within goal	99%	93%	-6%

Building activity



Holy Redeemer Catholic Church

Building permits issued	2007	2008	% change
Single Family and Duplex	1245	592	-52%
Residential Addition/ Alteration	1236	1021	-17%
Multi-Family	34	2	-94%
Commercial	249	290	16%

Construction activity has slowed to the point that measures were implemented to offset revenue decreases in this fee-based program. Staffing was reduced by over 50 percent and permit center hours were modified to 62.5 percent of previous service hours. In addition a small percentage (about 2 percent) of inspections do not get done within our previous service expectation of the next day. These measures are extreme, but afford customers continued reasonable and reliable service.

Building inspectors performed 44,573 inspections in 2008 which is 23 percent less than 2007 with 58,592 inspections. There were 28,730 inspection stops in 2008 and 19,560 in 2007 which is a decrease of 32 percent.

Residential valuations for 2008 were \$130 million which is down 50 percent since 2007 when they were \$261 million. In 2008 commercial valuations came in at \$80 million which is a 31 percent decrease from



Washington State University - Vancouver

Code enforcement activity

Code violations	2007	2008	% change
Building	577	499	-13%
Environmental	559	444	-21%
Fire	19	17	-11%
Nuisance	855	740	-13%
Public Service	135	106	-21%
Zoning	541	412	-24%
Total violations	2,708	2,212	-18%
Total cases opened	2,049	1,755	-14%

Code Enforcement is seeing an increasing number of homes being abandoned leaving trash, garbage, and broken furniture strewn throughout the yards. Since early 2008 Code Enforcement spends much of their time tracking down a responsible party or mortgage company to take care of the disrepair and clean up of junk and debris left behind. Other homes have become attractive hangouts for transients and had to be boarded up to prevent access. Abandoned homes become an eyesore to the neighborhood very quickly.

As a result of the foreclosures and the economy, there are more accessory buildings being used as living spaces. Individuals and families that are out of work are now making living quarters in the garage, barn, or travel trailer of a friend or relative. Code Enforcement has compassion for the hardships many are suffering, however we have to be concerned about their safety first since these structures are not designed for living quarters. Many wood stoves and portable heaters that are blatant fire hazards have been found as heat sources.

The Code Enforcement team was reduced from a staff of ten to six. With a reduction of three officers, providing the same level of customer service will be a challenge. Priorities have been established and there are some complaints that will not result in a field inspection. In the case of minor violations, notification of the complaint will be sent by postcard asking for voluntary compliance.



Before



After

Fire code activity



Inspecting a fire suppression system

Fires in apartment complexes have long been an identified fire concern in Clark County. This is due to the close proximity of many residences and the potential for the spread of fire from one dwelling unit to another.

In response to these concerns, the Clark County Fire Marshal's Office has joined with several local fire departments in a monthly newsletter project of fire prevention tips that is sent to apartment managers.

Fire code plan review	goal	2007	2008	% change
New construction	10 days	6 days	4.5 days	-25%

Fire code	2007	2008	% change
Investigations	150	154	3%
Building plan reviews	554	345	-38%
New construction inspection	719	630	-12%
Existing occupancy inspections	1,562	1,575	1%
Land Use Planning reviews	425	355	-16%

Department stats

Our customers may rate their satisfaction with our service on a survey available in our lobbies. Based on their ratings a grade is assigned for each criteria.

	2007	2008
Promptness of initial greeting	A-	A-
Time spent waiting for service	B+	B+
Courtesy/personal attention	A-	A-
Knowledge level of employees	A-	A
Efficiency of service provided	A-	A
Usability of information	A-	B+
Overall service	B+	B